

PUBLIC SAFETY: Permit or licence not required

Starter pistols, replicas not needed, police say

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Law enforcement is taking aim at starter pistols, saying that in the wrong hands the devices pose a safety hazard.

While neighbouring police forces are demanding tighter restrictions, one York Regional Police deputy chief suggests starter pistols and other replica handguns aren't needed at all.

The comments follow incidents involving starter pistols in York and Durham in the past month.

A Vaughan man was charged with possession of a weapon for a dangerous purpose Feb. 15 after police were called to Richmond Hill, Sgt. Gary Phillips said.

This month, Durham Regional Police seized four starter pistols used in crimes or

intended for that purpose.

You don't need a licence or permit to buy a starter pistol in Ontario, police said.

'As soon as that pistol gets into the wrong hands, there is a potential problem confronting the public and law enforcement.'

While Deputy Chief Bruce Herridge believes laws and regulations for firearms are effective, more education and awareness may be needed when it comes to the potential dangers of starter pistols.

A starter pistol should serve its purpose without replicating a firearm, the deputy chief suggested.

"As soon as that pistol gets into the wrong hands, there is a potential problem confronting the public and law enforcement," he said, adding anything that looks like a firearm can escalate a situation.

It's difficult to determine the number of starter pistols currently on the streets, police said.

Meanwhile, one of the pistols seized by Durham officers had been modified to fire real bullets, Durham police said.

Something needs to be done to tighten up the purchase, ownership and conversion options, Durham police Chief Mike Ewles said in a statement.

He said it is becoming clear to Durham

police that criminals are using starter pistols to threaten and intimidate people.

Durham's chief said he is going to ask politicians to lobby for tighter controls on the sale of starter pistols. Chief Ewles also hopes design changes will prevent starter pistols from being converted into real weapons.

Police in other parts of Canada say they are also making arrests related to starter pistols.

Officers with the gang task force of British Columbia's combined forces special enforcement unit conducted a raid in New Westminster Feb. 25, after determining through a five-month investigation that a military surplus store was selling starter pistols and starter "machine guns". Police said some customers were being told how to convert the starter devices into firearms.

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